

what would happen if Congress failed to act and the administration was forced to make desperate spending decisions in August. And the scenarios were worse than grim.

Potentially at risk are: the benefits and health care we owe our veterans, loans for struggling small businesses, food stamps for those struggling to buy groceries, Social Security checks for our seniors, unemployment benefits for the millions of workers desperately seeking jobs, and even active duty pay for our military. These risks are unacceptable.

Senior citizens in this great country are worried that the Social Security checks they depend on, and that they have been promised, may not be coming in the mail in 2 weeks. And then they read the news and hear that Republicans are still "playing games."

Mothers and fathers are sitting around their kitchen table, trying to figure out what they would do if the food stamps they count on to feed their kids got cut off. And then they turn on the television, and see reports of the House of Representatives sending us a bill that cannot pass. This is an embarrassment. And the American people deserve better.

Democrats have come to the table again and again with reasonable proposals for coming to an agreement. We have come to the middle. We have offered up serious and deep cuts in Federal spending. But again and again, Republicans have said no.

So far, they have refused to make any deal that does not protect tax cuts and loopholes for oil companies, private jets, and millionaires and billionaires and as we see today, they seem to be more focused on offering up red meat to their base than actual solutions for the American people and more focused on negotiating tensions within their own party than on working with us to get results.

So, with 13 days to go, I urge House Republicans to get serious about this.

The so-called cut, cap, and balance bill is bad policy. It is the kind of silly politics that Americans are sick of, and it is a waste of time that we as a country simply cannot afford right now.

If all it took were slogans and gimmicks to solve this crisis, House Republicans would have this covered. But we know that is not the case. And the clock is ticking for families across America.

Democrats are going to keep working to solve this crisis. We are ready to compromise. And we need a partner at the table that is just as serious about this as we and the American people are.

I yield the floor.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from Nebraska.

#### HEALTHCARE FAIRNESS

Mr. NELSON of Nebraska. Madam President, I rise today to speak about legislation that I believe is very impor-

tant for the future of health care fairness in our country.

Yesterday, I introduced the Savings Through Eligibility Fairness Act, which addresses Medicaid fairness and debt reduction. My friend and colleague from Wyoming, the ranking member of the HELP Committee, Senator ENZI, has a shared interest in this issue, and I commend and appreciate his offering of similar legislation and offer to continue to work with him to deal with and find solutions to this issue.

Medicaid is an important safety net for Nebraska and our country's most vulnerable families. I am committed to making sure they will continue receiving health care coverage. Unfortunately, the health care reform law passed last year would inadvertently make some middle-class Americans eligible for Medicaid who should not be eligible for Medicaid. My bill changes the law to ensure that only the neediest Nebraskans and Americans would qualify for the Medicaid expansion and health exchange subsidies created by the health reform law.

This simple, reasonable change has a significant impact: It saves \$13 billion. Let me repeat that—\$13 billion worth of savings. My bill commits that \$13 billion will be used to pay down the national deficit. As Washington debates various debt-reduction plans, my bill offers one concrete, commonsense way to reduce the national debt by \$13 billion. We hear a lot of different ideas but not with the same level of concrete, commonsense approach.

I regularly hear from Nebraskans who are already benefiting from the new health care law—children remaining on their parents' coverage, seniors closing the doughnut hole, and young people no longer being denied coverage because of preexisting conditions. Those are Nebraskans who are already benefiting from the new health care law. So improvements such as the one I have proposed will save money and help reduce the national debt, while still protecting health care for Nebraska and American families.

In the current debate of how best to reduce spending and reduce our Nation's deficit, I believe Congress should start with this commonsense approach. It will maintain sensible eligibility requirements for the Medicaid expansion and health exchange subsidies rather than focusing on shifting costs to States, providers, and the people who rely on this most important program.

Right now, most States do include Social Security income when deciding who will be eligible for Medicaid. So my legislation will maintain that definition for establishing eligibility for both Medicaid and health exchange subsidies. Keeping this same definition consistently will ensure Medicaid will not start down the path of covering middle-income families, which has never been the purpose of this program, nor should it be. Rather, Medicaid is part of a critical safety net for the most vulnerable and the most in need.

Let me point out an important fact. Those who would no longer qualify for the Medicaid expansion would still be eligible to receive health insurance coverage through the State health insurance exchange and subsidies where appropriate. So they will receive the health care they need. As a result, the Congressional Budget Office has estimated that the savings through the Eligibility Fairness Act will have a negligible effect on the total number of individuals projected to be insured as a result of health care reform.

Let me conclude and summarize by saying that Medicaid is an important health safety net for Nebraska and America's most vulnerable citizens. I am committed to preserving this program for more than 200,000 Nebraskans out of 1.85 million who include children, seniors, pregnant mothers, and the disabled. I am committed to maintaining this coverage for these Nebraskans in this fashion.

I yield the floor, and I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. MERKLEY. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. MERKLEY. I ask unanimous consent to speak as in morning business for up to 10 minutes.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

#### THE BUDGET

Mr. MERKLEY. Madam President, this weekend I was in eastern Oregon holding townhalls. At each gathering, citizens asked me: How important is August 2? Are the Members of the Senate going to be able to come together and make sure our Nation doesn't default?

I rise today to address that question. Indeed, it would be historic, the first time in the history of the United States that we will have refused to pay our bills.

Some of my colleagues have called into question the significance of such an event. One of my colleagues said:

I am a little bit cynical about the scare mongering and putting America's back up against this August 2 deadline just to get an increase in the American credit card.

I heard some of my colleagues talk about the situation in which they view paying the interest on Treasury bills as equivalent to a family holding a mortgage; and the fact that the United States has other bills, such as checks to write to our veterans and our senior citizens, as more equivalent to utility bills; and that somehow, as long as you keep paying on your mortgage, you can quit making your payments on your utilities; that is, other payments for